

Issue Paper

Comments on the Briefing Documents on Asian Carp (Silver Carp and Bighead Carp)

Two species of introduced, Asian carp, the Bighead and Silver carp, are now within 50 miles of Lake Michigan. If Asian carp become established in Lake Michigan, the economic and ecological consequences of their establishment will be severe, and potentially catastrophic. The carp are voracious feeders, growing to 100 pounds and are capable of laying up to 2 million eggs per year. The Asian carp have no natural predators in North America and their establishment in the Lake is likely to destroy native fish populations, reversing the progress accomplished to date of re-establishing native fish populations. Asian carp can dominate the fish community in areas where they are established in the Mississippi River Basin.

A temporary, demonstration, electric fish barrier is in place approximately 30 miles from the lake on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, and a more permanent, improved version is scheduled for installation in 2004. The demonstration barrier may not be 100 percent effective in stopping the exotic carp. An expert panel of fishery scientists, engineers, and allied interested parties was formed and has met several times over the last six months and concluded that a last resort strategy is needed to control the exotic carp if they near the barrier. This strategy would use a fish toxicant such as rotenone or antimycin to eradicate all fish life within a proscribed section of the canal. Because it is quite likely that the Asian carp will eventually return to this section of the canal, this strategy should be viewed as temporary measure to buy time for completion of the permanent barrier.

The use of rotenone or antimycin was chosen due to their selective effects on fish, with minimal harm to other wildlife. Both piscicides can be detoxified in-situ if needed. The piscicides would be applied only if Asian carp were detected close to the demonstration barrier during the regular monitoring cycles conducted by participating agencies. While Asian carp would be eliminated in this way, it must be anticipated that some native fish would unfortunately perish in order to prevent the disastrous spread of Asian Carp into Lake Michigan. The Science Advisory Committee of the Illinois River Coordinating Council concurs that the judicious use of piscicides can be used as an effective measure of last resort to control the spread of Asian carp.